SINO-INDIA COMPETITIVE CO-EXISTENCE IN SOUTH ASIA: A GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS IN THE 21st CENTURY

SYNOPSIS

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SUPERVISOR

Dr. Rashmimala Sahu

Sr. Assistant Professor & Head of Department,

Department of Political Science

Nirmala College,

Ranchi University, Ranchi, Jharkhand

RESEARCHER

Sudipti Khushboo Lakra

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State of the Art

South Asia is an economically prosperous region and due to its geopolitical location, it remains as a key factor in the international sphere. It has been an important region for a long period of time, whether in the pre cold war period or during cold war or even after the end of cold war.

After the second world war, South Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh got independence and their entry into the international arena totally changed the internal politics of South Asia. Moreover, the competition to secure the national interests between the states of this region created a situation of war and peace. The states of this region had different capabilities thus they created a situation of balance of power in this region.

India is the largest economic and military power compared to the other states of South Asia and therefore South Asian politics revolve around India. India has a central geographical location and because of it, it has a close political, economic and cultural tie with its neighbours and thus has a significant influence over this region.

But in the last two decades, a geopolitical shift can be seen in this region. This is because of the increasing Chinese activities and influence in this region. This is threatening India's position and sometimes even its security. Due to its economic rise, China has the capacity to offer large-scale financial assistance in terms of infrastructure and security arena. And due to this its engagement with South Asian countries has increased. This increasing influence of China in this region has brought a change in India's relationship with its neighbouring countries.

China has both the capacity and willingness to offer large scale infrastructural financing, and in its relationship with the South Asian nations the military dimension is becoming increasingly important. China's economic and political profile is rapidly expanding in South Asia. Its influence has increased in this region through investment, trade, militaries and diplomatic and cultural initiatives.

China has some general as well as country specific interests in the region. It is very much dependent on the shipping routes that connect the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, through the Strait of Malacca and, China uses this corridor for carrying 80 percent of its oil imports, and China has been continuously building ports that could provide protection to this route.

Under the presidentship of Xi Jinping China has also been giving major attention to the China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In certain occasions, President Jinping has indicated that South Asia is the focal point of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

China's strategic plans to gain access to the Indian Ocean through South Asia for its Southwestern provinces have been part of its broader geopolitical and economic agenda. This strategy is commonly referred to as the Strings of Pearl theory which outlines China's efforts to establish a network of ports and naval bases along the Indian Ocean Rim. One significant project within its framework is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to connect China's western region of Xinjiang with Pakistan's Gwador port. This route provides China with a potential gateway to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. By developing infrastructure and trade routes, China intends to secure its energy supplies from the Middle East and Africa as well as expand its economic influence in the region. Additionally, China has been involved in various infrastructure projects in other South Asian countries, such as Sri Lanka, Nepal

and Bangladesh. These projects include the construction of ports, roads, railways and industrial zones, all of which contribute to China's goal of gaining access to the Indian Ocean. China's efforts to expand its presence in the Indian Ocean region have raised concerns among neighbouring countries and other global powers. Some view it as a potential threat to regional stability and the existing power dynamics, as it may increase China's military capabilities and influence in the area.

China's infrastructure projects in South Asia are often presented as mutually beneficial partnership, aiming to boost regional connectivity and economic growth. Overall, China plans to gain access to the Indian ocean through South Asia for its broader geopolitical and economic strategies. While these efforts have raised concerns among some, their ultimate formulating impact and outcome remain uncertain and subject to geopolitical development in the region.

India has been formulating and implementing a multi-faceted strategy to counter balance China's growing influence in the region. This strategy involves a combination of diplomatic, economic and military measures aimed at protecting India's national interests and maintaining a balance of power in the region. For this, it has been trying to create a positive and deep relation with its neighbouring countries.

India's relations with Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka in the 21st century have evolved significantly, with a focus on deepening economic ties, enhancing connectivity and strengthening diplomatic relationships. These countries hold strategic importance for India due to their geographical proximity, cultural linkages and shared historical ties. Overall, India's relations with these countries in the 21st century have been characterised by a desire for closer economic integration, connectivity and diplomatic collaboration. While there have been

occasional challenges, the countries have worked towards finding common ground and strengthening their ties for mutual benefit.

Many political scientists, researchers and scholars in the field of international relations have analysed the Indo-China relationship and after studying many journals, magazines, working papers, newspapers, books and articles, the major findings of the authors are being reviewed in the following ways: -

1. **David M. Malone's** book, **"Does the Elephant Dance?: Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy",** deals with the main features of India's foreign policy, vis-à-vis its South Asian neighbourhood.
2. **Bhumitra Chakma** and **Xiudian Dai** in their book, **"The Belt and Road Initiative and the Politics of Connectivity: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the 21st Century (2022),"** have analysed India's reaction towards the China's Belt and Road Initiative. The book has explored the various dimensions of India's response to the BRI, including its concerns over sovereignty, security and economic implications. This book has provided a comprehensive analysis of India's response to the BRI and its implications for the Sino-Indian Rivalry in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region.
3. **Kingshuk Nag**, in his book, **"A New Silk Road: India, China and the Geopolitics of Asia (2021)"**, has dealt with the confrontation between India and China in the border areas of Ladakh. It throws light on how CPEC is an ambitious project of President Xi and how CPEC is a way for the Chinese to get a toehold in Ladakh. The book also deals with how the rivalry between these two countries effects the South Asian region.
4. The book, **"The Long Game: How the Chinese Negotiate with India (2022),"** written by **Vijay Gokhale**, has tried to show some aspects about how the relation and negotiations between two Asian giants take place. The book is written with a purpose to identify the strategy, tactics and tools that China employs in its diplomatic negotiations with India and also the learnings for

India from its past dealings with China that may be helpful in future negotiations with the country.

5. India's former Foreign Secretary, **Shyam Saran's** latest book, **"How China Sees India and the World: The Authoritative Account of the India-China Relationship (2022)"**, delivers a clean perspective about the emergence of the geo-strategic power, China. This book aims to provide a lesson for India as well as other countries about how to establish its strategic importance.
6. **Shivshankar Menon**, in the book**, "India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past, Present"**, addresses many questions which perplex India, as the nation seeks to find its way in the increasingly complex world of Asian Geopolitics. He has seen India as authoritative, comprehensive and deeply engaged in the Asian geopolitics.
7. The book**, "The Politics of Regionalism in South Asia,"** written by **B. Mohanan**, attempts to analyse the different trends and shifts in the South Asian region. It also states that India has got a special role in regional cooperation in South Asia and that it is a major force that can balance the growing influence of China in this region.
8. The book, **"South Asia in 21st Century: Issues and Challenges,"** written by **Dr. Meena Bardia**, deals with issues that South Asia as a region face. Reading about the problems of this region, one can identify the major areas where India can help these countries and can cooperate to counter-balance China.
9. **B. M. Jain**, in his book, **"India in the New South Asia: Strategic, Military and Economic Concerns in the Age of Nuclear Diplomacy (2012)"**, re-evaluates India's security, strategic and nuclear policy in the new South Asia of post 9/11 era. He also provides a reappraisal of the regional security implications of India's turbulent relationships with Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. He has also examined the strategic engagement of America, Russia and China with South Asian states.

Problems to be Investigated

The concerns that will be analysed in this context are-

i. What is the current progress in Indo-China relations?
ii. How has China been spreading its influence in the South Asian region?
iii. What type of relation does India share with its neighbouring countries?
iv. What is the role of the smaller South Asian countries in establishing a balance between India and China?
v. What is India's strategy to counter balance China in the South Asian region?

Objective of the Study

1. To analyse the issues in the India-China relation and figure out the reasons behind it.
2. Examining the geopolitics of South Asia and analyse the Chinese strategy in this region.
3. To explore the opportunities and possibilities of India in the South Asia region.
4. To determine the strategic importance of South Asia for the western power and examine their vision regrading this region.
5. To determine and analyse India's strategy to counter-balance China in the South Asian region.

Motivation

The motivation to choose this particular area for my research study came from the book, "Does the Elephant Dance?", written by David M. Malone. This book analyses India's role in South Asia by highlighting many aspects. Malone in the book has contextualised India's foreign policy within the framework of China's

growing influence in the region and it has also illustrated how India is adapting its strategies to counter balance this challenge.

This book awakened my interest in the geopolitical challenges and strategies in the South Asian region. I wanted to understand and gather more knowledge on the importance and role of India in this region and how the Indo-China relation influence the South Asian region.

Research Hypothesis

1. By establishing itself as a potential power in the South Asian region, India has gained more international support as a counter-balance to China.
2. The Indo-China strategical competition has intensified with the intermediation of the extra-regional actors in the South Asia.
3. India and China have navigated their rivalry through a framework of competitive coexistence while managing geopolitical tensions in South Asia.

Research Design and Methodology

The methodology of this study will be rooted in the review of available literatures and their analysis. The literature reviewed will be both academic and general. And thus, the research methodology used for this study will be descriptive, exploratory, analytical, historical and prescriptive.

Tools to be used in collection of data

The data will be collected from books, magazines, journal, articles, working papers, official strategical reports available in public domain and by observing and analysing the proceedings of various summits and conferences held at the international, regional and national level etc.

Tentative Chapterisation

Introduction
Chapter 1: India – China Relations: A Historical Perspective
Chapter 2: China's South Asian Strategy in 21st Century.
Chapter 3: India's Role and Engagement in South Asia's Geopolitical Landscape.
Chapter 4: Understanding the Role of Smaller States in South Asia's Strategic Interplay.
Chapter 5: Cooperation and Competition in Indo-China Relations in 21st Century: Issues and Opportunities
Conclusion.

Significance of the Study

India and China cannot be said the best neighbouring countries, as the relationship that they share has seen many ups and downs. The border areas have always been a litmus test of the state of the relationship between the two countries. Through the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, India and China were successful in putting aside the boundary conflicts, maintaining the peace on the border and developing the rest of the relationship. The crisis in relationship between the two countries has been building since 2012. India-China relations have deteriorated since 2012. There were many signs of increasing tension. Border incidents became more frequent and larger in scale with Depsang in 2013, Chumar in 2014, Doklam in 2017 and the most recent in Galwan in 2020.

Today, the relative balance of power between India and China is not what it was in 1980s. Then the two economies were almost of the same size. In fact, India was more integrated into the world economy than China. Today, after almost 40 years of reform and export-led growth, the Chinese economy is almost five times

larger than India's. Not only economically but China is also continuously rising as a military, technological as well as a maritime power.

The People's Liberation Army is now a semi-permanent presence in the Indian Ocean Region that could be used for military purposes from Gwadar to Hambantota to Khyaukpyu. As India sees the rise of China in South Asian Region and its presence in the Indian Ocean Region as a threat, China too has her complaints. India was the first and only invitee to respond negatively to Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative. As US-China relations deteriorated in the last decade, India's ties with the US have strengthened, particularly in the area of defence, much to the irritation of China. Also, India revived the QUAD and committed itself to a 'free and open Indo-Pacific', the concept that China has always seen with suspicion and is opposed to it.

The India-China relationship has been through a crisis in 2020, especially after the Galwan valley incident. What China did in April-May by changing the situation on the ground, shifting the Line of Actual Control and Preventing Indian patrols on territory hitherto controlled by India, was a fundamental and consequential shift in behaviour.

Chinese actions have actually brought about much closer relationship between India and the USA. And the defence, security and intelligence links between India, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore and others have greatly increased in quality and quantity in the last decade and half.

China's relationship with Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka in the 21st Century has seen significant developments. China has pursued closer ties with these countries as part of its broader strategic objectives, including, expanding its influence in South Asia and countering India's regional dominance. Overall, China's engagement with these countries in the 21st century has been multifaceted

and driven by economic, political and strategic considerations. While China aims to expand its influence and secure its interests, the response from each country has varied depending on their own priorities and concerns.

The rise and expansion of China, militarily and economically and its growing influence in South Asia has forced India to redefine its policies and priorities in this region. India's perception towards China has changed post-Galwan. China's growing ambitions, increasingly aggressive foreign policy and border conflicts with India is forcing India to establish itself as leading power in the South Asia. The US, Japan and ASEAN also see India as a possible counter-balance.

This study will thus be relevant in exploring different ways in which India can have more cordial relations with its neighbours to counter-balance China in South Asia and reduce its influence in this region.

It will also be relevant to find out possible solutions to the conflicts between these two countries. A cordial relation between the two Asian powers can lead to a collective regional growth and can pave way for a new world order with Asia's dominant position in it.

Contribution to the Existing Knowledge

India-China relations have always been considered as an important aspect of the international relations. Being the two largest countries of Asia, their actions and strategies have always attracted the attention of the rest of the world. And thus, India-China relations have always been an important topic of research among the scholars. Any study done on the relationship between these two countries will surely add up to the existing knowledge on this topic. Also, since this research work also involves the geo-politics of South Asia and the role of smaller countries of this region, therefore, this research study will also help in presenting and

highlighting a different aspect of the relationship between the two countries in this region and present a clear picture of South Asia.

Future Work

International politics have always been dynamic in nature. The relations between the countries, the rise and decline of powers have always been a constant phenomenon in international politics. In future, any researcher or scholar who wishes to study the relations between India and China and the geopolitical strategy of South Asia, can take help from the findings of this study. findings of this research can be used to analyse and understand the contemporary scenario in international politics and can also be redefined and refuted by any future studies in this area.

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